Today is one of those days when so many different things (celebrations and messages) converge, each one of them being worthy of a whole sermon by themselves. It is, as you probably know, the feast day of St. Anthony the Great. We celebrate him on January 17 each year. I won’t say much about him because your bulletin says a lot about him but let me just say how much I love him for not caving into the societal pressures of his own day. When others were coming to the church because it was the thing to do, and becoming Christians in name only, St. Anthony, an uneducated man, became one of the greatest spiritual fathers and wise men of his own day. Read about him.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, one that is particular to St. Anthony, we heard, “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight.” Do you remember last week? The message is similar: may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do His will. You’ve been blessed for a purpose: to serve God, to serve His Church, to serve your brothers and sisters, to serve, to serve, to serve. God made us to serve.

So, why are there so few servants today? Perhaps the answer is in the gospel. In this beautiful story of healing, the cleansing of the ten lepers, we see our modern
society crystal clear: so blessed yet so ungrateful. So wanting of God’s grace, yet so blind to His actual work in us. You know the story: ten were cleansed of their leprosy but only one man, a despised Samaritan came back to actually thank Jesus. Only grateful Christians grow in understanding God’s grace. Only grateful Christians, I believe, are able to develop a true relationship with God and are capable of living humble, faithful, generous, loving, fulfilling lives. That’s what gratitude does: it opens us up to all the virtues flooding in.

Now, the final theme of the day refers to something in your bulletin this morning. This is not an ecclesiastical holiday but a day of remembrance for churches of every denomination around the Commonwealth today. Last week, some of you were shocked to learn about the radical law recently passed in our Massachusetts, overriding the governor’s veto. It was a bill pushed forward by our own Harriette Chandler. It was a law that expanded abortion to girls from the age of 16 without requiring parental consent. This law also allows not only abortion up to the time of birth, but it even allows the doctor to kill the child outside of the womb should it be born unwanted by the mother. It is true infanticide – absolutely appalling.

Now, I know that this subject is controversial to some and I understand that there are some situations where an abortion seems to be the most compassionate thing for a mother, but those situations account for less than 1% of all abortions.
Most people have no idea what is happening and even most clergy will not address this or speak against it. I’m not one of those. The Christian faith and the words of Christ Himself are so abundant clear that you and I are holy in the eyes of God. Denying that God exists cannot change what we know to be true. Humanity matters, especially to God, but it should matter to us, also. Remember, you’re not accountable to them; you’re accountable to God for what you do. We are His children. He created us. He creates us and His willingness to do all that He did – to even die so that we would live with godly honor – should be reason enough for all of us to be appalled and to speak out and let Harriette and Jim and the others know what we think of their decisions.

I’ll end with this on a very positive note. I can’t tell you how thankful I was last week to see your response for RJ, the man whose leg was amputated. Within one week, we had him indoors for the whole week but, beyond that, we have a motorized chair for him. I’ll say more about that in a moment. So, let’s keep that up. Let’s orient ourselves individually and collectively even more to outreach and evangelism, being an example for others, and a source of compassion for those who need us most because every human being is worthy of that from the womb to the tomb.